



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0230GA-2 for Cobb County School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	2
<p>(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>The vision "Our vision is for sustained and comprehensive reform in the middle school program that will prepare students to succeed in college, in careers, and in life" corresponds to and meet the requirement for this area. The influence of the vision on the elementary and high schools is implied while Project R.E.A.C.H. addresses personalizing learning of middle schools students. The R.E.A.C.H. program offers a contextual as well as easy to remember acronym with which to drive and remember the initiative. R.E.A.C.H. expresses values that are commensurate with the intention of the award.</p> <p>There is no statement regarding using standards or assessments to prepare students for college or careers. The applicant indicates values that support students learning for college and careers but there is no mention of standards.</p> <p>There is no statement regarding the building of data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers about how they can improve instruction.</p> <p>There is no statement about recruiting, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers.</p> <p>There is no statement about turning around lowest achieving schools.</p>		
(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	8
<p>(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>There is a description of the process to select schools to participate. There were district level meetings of principals, curriculum supervisors, teachers, and past middle school principals to identify participating schools.</p> <p>All schools were "very interested in the reform model." There are 13 schools participating in the grant representing 5,191 students in grades 6 through 8, and all curricular areas.</p> <p>The participating schools include high needs student populations that are representative of the district demographics. The CCSD Race & Ethnicity table indicates student populations by percentage: 43.7 white, 31.2 black, 16.9 Hispanic, 4.9 Asian, 3 multi-racial, .1 American Indian, 14 students with disabilities, and 44 economically disadvantaged students.</p>		
(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	10
<p>(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>A "high quality" plan is identified that includes tracking students, support of students, providing teachers "the opportunity to pursue additional certifications which will facilitate smaller teaching teams to ensure individual, differentiated, and personalized learning." Appropriate timelines and rationales are articulated. This student-centered focus that engages teachers and uses technology (BYOD), etc., reflects the intention of RTTDD. There are clear and thoughtful "core values" for R.E.A.C.H. including curriculum, advice and guidance, assessment for learning, school organization and design, workforce development, new technology, mentoring, and student voice which support the vision and goals of the proposed initiative.</p>		

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	10
(A)(4) Reviewer Comments: <p>Articulated description of the implementation of each goal and thus the entire proposed initiative reflects the intention of RTTD. A "high quality plan" which addresses increasing student academic performance, decreases the achievement gaps, increases graduation rates, increases college enrollment, and influences the attainment of a postsecondary degree are embodied in LEA-wide goals that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The redesign of the middle school day • Promoting the development of personal skills of middle school students • Building and sustaining strong professional and personal relationship between students and teachers • Design and implement comprehensive assessments that measure learning, thinking, and college and career readiness • Use technology to enhance learning, increase intra and inter-communication between the education community 		

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	12
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: <p>The district has a track record of success including 15 high schools receiving recognition for AP program achievement distinguished Title I schools, and success in achieving AYO for 5+ years. The graduation rate increased by .7% in one year (2011-2012). Schools of Excellence have been bestowed on 18 schools in the district from 2006 to 2011; National Blue Ribbon Schools have been bestowed on five schools from 2007 to 2012, plus numerous additional awards and recognitions.</p> <p>The achievement data presented in charts and tables demonstrate (1) consistently increasing achievement across the district and (2) a consistent focus of increasing academic success. The establishment and sustaining of the Intervention Team Process as presented demonstrates this system-wide commitment to improving learning (and teaching) for all children. "Data collection is an integral part of improving student achievement. Teachers have become proficient in using data to guide instruction and to individualize instruction for students" reflects the meaningful involvement of teachers in this continual process of improvement.</p> <p>Evidence for ambitious and significant reforms in the lowest-achieving schools is not apparent.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	4
(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: <p>This information is made available through state requirements. For example, the state requires data (including fiscal and personnel) transparency. The district posts an annual report of the budget for the community. Salaries and benefits "as a percentage of revenues and of expenditures are some of the specific data and information that is reported in accordance with state policy.</p> <p>It is not clear if expenditures are made available to the public by school.</p>		
(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	10
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:		

A table presents state initiatives by title and “state ruling” and what the district has done and is doing to meets the intent of the state ruling. Therefore, the district meshes with the state yet has the autonomy to address the singular needs of its students and constituency.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	10
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The school board clearly identified the priorities of the district based on the involvement of the community, i.e., parents, those who did not have children in school, and representatives from business. Those priorities correspond to the goals and intentions of the R.E.A.C.H. program. For example, “The CCSD PTSA consistently participate in assisting the CCSD local schools with developing various program efforts to create and promote an academically challenging experience for students,” clearly played an important role in the R.E.A.C.H. initiative, and have been a critical participant in the history of the district.

Letters of support from the Chamber of Commerce, Classworks, Cobb EMC, Piedmont Church, Scholastic, and the Associate Vice President of Education and Community Relations are included in the application. Over 70% of the teachers responded to a survey in support of the proposal.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)	5	5
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(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

Based on the reality that “In fact, the data shows students dropping out of school in ninth grade” in the district, among other factors, the district clearly understands and tracks student academic progress. The “%Meets and Exceeds Standards on CRCT” chart and subsequent charts track the students focused in the R.E.A.C.H. program.

There is evidence of a high-quality plan that includes goals, activities, timelines, deliverables, and the parties responsible.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	20

(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Using current research and position statements, e.g. “Increased teacher time with students will be accomplished through redesigning the instructional day. According to the American School & University (www.assumag.com), “Classroom design soon will be dramatically different from what we see in schools today...even the term ‘classroom’ will become a misnomer, as the space essentially will serve as a flexible learning environment” the district addresses special needs students within the context of the county/community culture and within the context of sound research with an eye to the future. R.E.A.C.H. addresses the criteria in this area with a focus that reflects the goals stated earlier in the application: restructuring the middle school schedule to personalize learning, involving teachers to effectively meet current and future needs, and the increased use of technology are examples. Specific activities designed to achieve the outcomes of the effort are presented. In addition to goals and activities, timelines, deliverables, rationales for the activities, and responsible parties are included in the high-quality plan.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	20
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The need to shift from the “sage on the stage” is one of the focal points of the professional responsibilities of educators in the identified schools. The principles of the innovation, i.e., R.E.A.C.H. are clear and serve a unifying “thread” and it is assumed there will be professional development, continual and/or advance certification (as previously mentioned), and

there are efforts such as described, “Development and evaluation of teachers and administrators as instructional leaders for sustainability of the innovations will ensure student achievement continues to increase. As part of the Race to the Top Initiative (RT3), teachers and administrators will be evaluated through the new Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) and the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES) as an indicator of the overall effectiveness of the educators’ performances. The Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (Georgia Department of Education, 2012) will be used to:

- “Optimize student learning and growth.”
- “Improve the quality of instruction by ensuring accountability for classroom performance and teacher effectiveness.”
- “Contribute to successful achievement of the goals and objectives defined in the vision, mission, and goals of Georgia Public Schools.”
- “Provide a basis for instructional improvement through productive teacher performance appraisal and professional growth.”
- “Implement a performance evaluation system that promotes collaboration between the teacher and evaluator and promotes self-growth, instructional effectiveness, and improvement of overall job performance” but the mechanism for implementing these is not clear. Instruments are available in the appendix such as “walk through” in Appendix 14.

Information presented earlier in the application indicated teachers current have and will increase their ability to effectively use data to personalize learning and to increase student achievement.

All elements of a high-quality plan are evident.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	15
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: <p>District policies are aligned with and support the R.E.A.C.H. initiative. The structure of school leadership teams, school strategic plans, framework for school success, and Rtl (and the Framework for Success presented in Appendix 15) indicate a flexible system in place to support and sustain the initiative. The six areas listed with “Instruction”, the two with “Assessment”, and the “Data Teams” provide a working, dynamic structure for all students. Elements of a high-quality plan are evident.</p> <p>Students are given virtual and technology enhanced opportunities for learning. It is not clear to what extent students are given the opportunity to earn credit based on demonstrated mastery rather than seat time.</p>		
(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	10
(D)(2) Reviewer Comments: <p>“Empowering Dreams of the Future” provides a center piece around which the stakeholders as articulated in the application. To support the immediate and long-term of the project the district has in place supportive policies andn structures that can be modified. For example, the district has established a structure of interconnectedness through the Framework for School Success that allows schools to function as a unified system but retain flexibility in implementation of practice. This action impacts what happens at the sites of each of the schools thus allowing building leadership (principals) and leadership teams (principals, teachers and parents) the flexibility to implement the plan in line with its specific community. The CCSD’s infrastructure reflects our commitment to success for all students, whatever it takes. The district culture of interconnectedness, hard work and shared leadership provides opportunities for</p>		

students to R.E.A.C.H. their potential and to actively engage educators and the community in the process of continuous improvement. Right now/as needed and long-term professional development programs for a entire school staff and/or for individuals is in place.

- a. The plan includes all participating middle school students by identified subgroups. Stakeholders have access to data and information to be aware of and to maintain support of the initiative.
- b. Technical support exists and will be expanded to assure continuous information to and from stakeholders about R.E.A.C.H.
- c. The Data Warehouse will provide a secure yet usable storage for records pertinent to the project.
- d. Departments, e.g., human resources, curricular specialists, etc. will have access to all district and school data and information
- e. Elements of a high-quality plan are in place.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	15
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: "(P)rogress toward project goals and opportunities for ongoing corrections and improvements during and <u>after</u> the term of the grant" are articulated in the application. There is a solid description of how the data will be used for each focus group, e.g. "Focus 1: Personalized Learning for Students".		
(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	4
(E)(2) Reviewer Comments: A brief description of the dissemination of the progress of R.E.A.C.H. will be provided by a "representation from teachers, administrators, and counselors" *There is no mention of the audience of this information such as parents, students, etc.		
(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	5
(E)(3) Reviewer Comments: Including previously presented information regarding project goals plus the information presented in Table E-3, this is an ambitious and achievable plan to measure the project. Articulated targets are or will be presented (according to grant reporting responsibilities) in tables.		
(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	5
(E)(4) Reviewer Comments: As stated, the evaluation plan and strategy is comprehensive, aligned with the intention of R.E.A.C.H. and designed to address the needs of students and the knowledge, skills, and attributes of educators.		

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	10
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:		

Post-funding sources and functions (uses) are identified in the “Proposed Three-Year Budget-Post Funding Period Table”. The content of this table and the narrative clearly identify the sources of the funds, the rationale for using those funds, and the use of the funds. For example,

Years 1-2-3 funds will be used to “Retain 9 Instructional Specialists and expanding to include additional Instructional Specialists – to be placed in other participating R.E.A.C.H. Model Title I Middle Schools”. In addition to the Title I source (and partner) CCSD technology, private grants, state grants, etc., and Title II will be funding and project partners.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	10
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The plan, as presented, holds promise for success during the span of the project and in the future. Support for the plan comes from the Chamber of Commerce, Classworks, Cobb EMC, Communities in Schools, the Piedmont Church, Scholastic, the Cobb Co. Board of Commissioners, Pearson, the Cobb Co. Association of Education, the Richardson Management Group, Chick-fil-a, parents, the Smyrna Education Foundation, Rotary, New Frontiers International, etc.

Future funds are specifically identified and there is a plan in place to seek resources, including funding, to sustain the Project. They include:

- Current understanding of the Project and what it will take to sustain the initiative
- The identification of what services/benefits will be lost if there is no plan to sustain them
- Use technical assistance from all sources to identify fiscally responsible approaches
- Develop a support campaign
- Identify how existing service resources may be adapted or what additional leadership is needed to support the Project
- Identify potential problems, barriers, or challenges to sustaining
- Review major financing sources and initiatives - public and private
- Use Project evaluation data and information to support sustainin the Project

Goals, activities with rationales, timelines, and parties responsbile are evident.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	10

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

The applicant has a track record, as described and commented on, of striving to increase the quality of learning for all students, particularly those with singular needs plus enhancing educator (teacher and leader) effectiveness. Through partnerships that are systemic to the district and which already exist, plus new partners that will provide specific current and long-term philosophical and financial support, R.E.A.C.H. has great potential for making a difference. Tables and strategies have been designed to track identified goal indicators – presented throughout the application – which will continue to address the needs of students “facing significant challenges” as well as the needs of all other students. The data/information indicates the left-brain intentions of the applicants. R.E.A.C.H. intends to continually address the social and emotional dimensions of students as well as academic needs and intends to achieve the following presented:

Decrease the amount of students who somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that behaviors in the classroom allow the teacher to teach so that I can learn by 20%.

Decrease the amount of students who somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that students are recognized for their good behavior by 20%.

Decrease the amount of students who somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that school is a place which I feel safe by 20%.

To *decrease* the amount of students who report using alcohol in the past 30 days by 20%.

To *decrease* the amount of students who report using marijuana in the past 30 days by 20%.

To *decrease* the amount of students who indicate “no” when asked if they knew an adult at school they could talk to if they needed help by 20%.

To match 20 students per school per year (60 per year total) with a community mentor.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments: The application, while having some areas that are in need of more information, does successfully meet the priority of addressing the creation, moniforing, developing, and sustaining a <i>Personalized Learning Environment</i> . This goal includes all school-community stakeholders and has real promise of success.		

Total	210	195
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Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)

	Available	Score
Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)	15	15
Optional Budget Supplement Reviewer Comments: The budget aligns with R.E.A.C.H. is realstic and supports the initiative.		



Race to the Top - District

Technical Review Form

Application #0230GA-3 for Cobb County School District

A. Vision (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	9
(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:		

The applicant describes a coherent vision that focuses on middle school reform based on a Rigor, Excellence, Attitude, Challenge, and Hope (R.E.A.C.H.) model. Components of this reform model is based on research that affirms the need for personalized learning environments rooted in the use of looping strategies, integrated units and project based learning.

The proposed reform model was vetted through a variety of stakeholders to include district's academic leadership team, principals, curriculum supervisors, and participating educators. Based on the extensive review from a variety of stakeholders, it is clear that the participating schools and educators support the implementation of the proposed middle school reform model.

The applicant describes a reasonable plan to address the core educational assurance area of developing formative assessments to improve instructional practices. The formative assessments will support the applicant's vision of integrated studies, personalized learning, and college and career readiness.

The applicant provides sufficient evidence as to its vision of continuing the comprehensive approach to build on the core education assurance of using data systems that measure student growth and success to inform teachers and principals on how they can improve instruction. School districts use student performance data to develop their school strategic plans and teachers include performance measures on data walls in their classrooms to track student performances. The applicant also provides sufficient evidence as to the use of comprehensive improvement strategies employed when a school is identified as a school of need based on student performance data.

The applicant asserts that the district's middle schools are in the process of moving toward curriculum standards based on the Common Core college and career readiness standards. The state is a part of the PARCC assessment consortium which is further proof of the adoption of standards and assessments linked to college and career readiness.

The applicant provides incomplete evidence as to the extent to which the applicant will build on its work in the core educational assurance area of "recruiting and retaining effective teachers."

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)	10	5
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(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant clearly describes a detailed process used to select schools to participate in the proposed reform model. Critical stakeholders were engaged in the development process and clearly had a choice to participate in the pilot implementation. A list of participating schools is documented in the application.

The applicant inadequately provides details of how students will be selected to participate in the reform model. For instance, Floyd Middle School is listed as a participating school of which only 852 of the 953 students enrolled will participate in the reform model. Without sufficient explanation as to why some students will be left out of the reform implementation of participating schools, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which there will likely be a "high-quality" school level implementation of the proposed reform model.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)	10	0
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(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant does not provide sufficient evidence of a high-quality plan as to how the proposed reform model will be scaled up in the district from the initial participating schools. As listed in the applicant's "Approach to Implementation" table, the initial participating schools only represent approximately 1.4% (1.25%, 1.75%, 0.87%, 1.72%) of the total LEA's low income population. The applicant does not provide evidence of how the applicant proposes to scale up the reform initiative to other middle schools in the LEA, particularly those schools with high low-income or high-need populations.

The applicant does not provide sufficient evidence of how the proposed REACH model will improve student learning. The applicant asserts that this model is innovative, however many of the strategies proposed are commonly used in education such as increased teacher time with students and common formative assessments.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)	10	4
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(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant's vision is likely to motivate students to learn. The applicant proposes to redesign the middle school instructional day to deliver differentiated instruction to each student based on their learning goals and objectives. The integration of core subjects within a longer instructional period is likely to assist students in making connections between what they are learning and hence motivate the students to learn. Professional development for teachers that focuses on project based learning and content integration will increase the effectiveness of the teacher to encourage student mastery of the learning goals and objectives.

However, the correlation between the proposed goals of the initiative and the "percent proficient growth" in summative assessment targets presented is unclear. The applicant provides inadequate justification as to how the proposed goals will have a direct correlation to an increase in state summative assessments such as Language Arts, Reading, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Although, the targets for each goal area during the four year implementation of the grant (2013-2017) shows an increase for each subgroup, it is unclear how the goals for some of the subgroups were established for the 2012-13 school year. For instance, the 2011-12 baseline for black students in the Language Arts state assessment was 91.8%. However, the SY 2012-13 target goal for this same subgroup of students in the same assessed area is 88.8%, which is a decrease from the baseline. Based on the applicant's proposal, this subgroup of students will not exceed the 2011-12 baseline until the third year of implementation of the grant. It is unclear if the applicant believes that the proposed initiative is not comprehensive enough to assist this subgroup of students in closing an achievement gap.

The applicant's proposal seems to lack breadth in the effort to increase graduation rates. The proposal focuses only on middle school reform which is a critical component to student success. Unfortunately, the proposed reform ends with an articulation from eighth to ninth grade. It is unclear how the proposed reform will address ambitious yet achievable goals for graduation rates and college enrollment.

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	12
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments: <p>The applicant presents evidence to the overall success of the school district to meet and exceed a variety of academic success measures such as high school Advanced Placement honors and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) acknowledgements.</p> <p>The applicant presents a clear record of success in the past four years of the overall student population meeting or exceeding standards as measured by the Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) in Reading, English Language Arts (ELA), Math, Science, and Social Studies. Based on the limited data provided for subgroups of students performance on the Reading, ELA, and Math, the applicant presents sufficient evidence of closing the achievement gaps between these subgroups over the past four years particularly in reading and ELA.</p> <p>The applicant presents a detailed and appropriate system for monitoring student achievement, identifying schools in need, and using student data to inform and improve instruction.</p> <p>The applicant does not present comprehensive results from the past four years for High School Graduation Tests. The applicant only presents comparison data for ELL and SWD student groups. The applicant does not present data for other student groups such as African American and Latino. Of the three years of high school graduation results, the applicant demonstrates inconsistent improvement on closing the achievement. The achievement gaps increased in SY 2009-2010.</p>		
(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)	5	5
(B)(2) Reviewer Comments: <p>The applicant demonstrates a high level of transparency in financial processes and practices at the district and school level. The applicant asserts that a Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) is posted yearly and past reports</p>		

archived for public viewing accessible from the district's website. The applicant further asserts that a public policy report card for parents that provides financial data per school is also accessible from the district's website.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)
10
5
(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides sufficient justification as to the compliance of the proposed district reform model with the state's legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements. Notable is the alignment with the state's initiative in project based learning and career path profiles.

However, also notable is the lack of evidence for support of the applicant's RTTT-D proposal from the state's department of education or from the mayor or designee of the applicant's district. It is difficult to confirm based on evidence presented in the application if the proposed district reform model aligns with the state's current reform initiatives being implemented under the RTTT grant.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)
10
3
(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides evidence to indicate community and business stakeholders support the proposed district reform model.

Through district level information sessions and surveys, over 70% of the teachers in eleven middle schools indicated they supported the district's plan for personalized learning in middle school and electronic portfolios for 5th graders transitioning to 6th grade. The extent to which the applicant acted on feedback from teachers and modified the proposed district reform model based on this feedback is not evident in the application.

It is evident by the 10/12/12 stakeholder meeting attendance and letter of support that the local education association (CCAE) was engaged just prior to submission of the district's RTTT-D application. It is not evident if this was the first opportunity for the CCAE representative to provide feedback.

Although a contact list is provided for the mayors of the cities in the district, the applicant does not provide evidence of support of the proposed district reform model from these mayors. The applicant does not provide evidence of the state's comments or decline to comment on the district's proposed district reform model.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)
5
5
(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents a reasonable and logical rationale for implementing personalized learning environments in middle school. The applicant asserts that data shows students are dropping out of school in its district in the ninth grade at an alarming rate. Hence, their graduation rate is only 73%. This fact justifies the need for reform in middle school to develop a student support system prior to high school.

Due to the current instructional structure of the middle schools, teachers and principals have not had success in implementing personalized learning environments. The proposed reform model of block instruction, interdisciplinary units, and effective use of technology in the classroom will likely provide more opportunity for the implementation of personalized learning environments in middle school.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	19
(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:		

The applicant justifies a very high quality plan for improving learning and teaching by personalizing the learning environment in order to provide all students the support to graduate college- and career-ready. The applicant proposes to implement a Middle Grades individual Learning Profile (ILP) that will commence with the student in 5th grade and follow the student through transition to 9th grade. The components of the ILP are comprehensive and appropriate to ensure the student is able to develop attainable individual academic and social/emotional goals and to reflect on his/her development through an electronic portfolio.

It is evident that an appropriate frequency of feedback on the ILP is provided throughout the middle grade years from a variety of stakeholders including a team of teachers and counselors.

Although the applicant did not assert specific strategies of how the ILP will be modified to accommodate the needs of high need students, the nature of an ILP in that it is an individualized plan provides sufficient evidence as the applicant's intent to meet the needs of all of the participating students.

The applicant provides adequate evidence to its intent to train the content specialist who in-turn will train the teachers on strategies for assisting students in utilizing the electronic portfolio and other tools (ex: Career Cruising program).

What's most notable about the applicant's plan to personalize the learning environment is that the proposed ILPs will likely feed directly into the state required Individualized Graduation Plan (IGP) that commences in 9th grade.

The applicant provides limited evidence as to the engagement of parents in the development of the proposed reform model. Of the few parent letters of support provided, two indicated support only for Griffin Middle school.

(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	20
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(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant documents an elaborate and effective plan for ensuring the participating educators have the capacity to improve instruction and increase student progress toward meeting college- and career-ready standards. The applicant asserts that all participating educators will engage in six training modules: Working effectively in an interdisciplinary team, Embracing a theme mentality for unit planning, Writing units, Project based learning, Assessments based on student data, and Writing lessons. These training modules are appropriate as they align with the applicant's proposed goals for personalizing the learning environment.

Instructional specialist will be hired for each grade level in the participating middle schools. The instructional specialist will provide frequent data-based feedback to their assigned teachers with the ultimate goal of improving each of the participating students success on learning objectives. The instructional specialist will also coach the teachers on appropriate strategies that could be employed to assist students with their academic goals. This tiered and personalized approach to staff development is likely to result in developing effective teachers to meet the proposed outcomes of the reform model.

The applicant provides evidence of the plan for participating principals to use the new teacher evaluation system - Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) and the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES) - developed through the state's RTTT initiative to provide timely and appropriate feedback to the participating teachers throughout the implementation of the proposed reform.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	13

(D)(1) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents evidence of a comprehensive plan to support project implementation through established policies and infrastructure. The LEA provides flexibility for schools to develop and implement innovative and specialized programs to improve student achievement (ex: Policy IDAI-R). There is also evidence of long-standing effective practices such as the development of school strategic plans and the utilization of an online curriculum portal for the planning and deliverance

of performance-based instruction. These established policies and practices are likely to be helpful to the participating educators as they implement the components of the proposed reform model.

Most notable is the established performance based benchmarks that reflect integration across multiple content areas. This type of performance measure aligns with the proposed reform model - R.E.A.C.H.- in that it measures knowledge and skills that is integrated across multiple content areas. This alignment between instructional strategy and assessments is likely to encourage teachers to implement the R.E.A.C.H. reform model and to sustain its implementation beyond the grant period.

The applicant provides sufficient evidence of established systems to address the learning needs of students with disabilities and English language learners. It is apparent that through strategies such as co-teaching, use of assistive technology, and the deployment of education program specialists to assist with meeting the needs of targeted groups of students, the applicant has a thorough plan for addressing the needs of students with disabilities and English language learners.

The applicant does not provide sufficient evidence of its plan to give students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of standards in multiple comparable ways. Besides the "multiple choice, constructed responses, and performance tasks" provided in the LEAs assessments, students are not presented with other types of non-traditional assessments to demonstrate mastery.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)	10	9
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(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides sufficient evidence that the participating educators have access to content, tools, and other learning resources through the online curriculum portal. The applicant provides sufficient evidence of its plan to utilize the "Bring Your On Device (BYOD) strategy and the Flipped Classroom Model to offer students the opportunity to access necessary content and learning resources in and out of school. However, the applicant does not provide evidence of a plan to include electronic tutors or other tools to assist with student learning.

The applicant provides sufficient evidence of its use of student data to make decisions regarding instruction and school improvement. Student data is accessible to educators, parents and students. Based on the proposed reform model, students will be provided with data to assist them with guidance from educators in developing their learning goals. Students will "track and manage" their own learning.

The applicant does not provide sufficient evidence of its plan to provide technical support and other outreach to parents.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	11
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: <p>The applicant provides an adequate plan for assessing progress on the four focus areas of the proposed reform model. Most notable are the student surveys, individual student interviews, and the use of the required Georgia Student Health Survey II to measure the effectiveness of the "Social Emotional Learning" component of the proposed reform model. Also notable is the use of the research based Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) tool to measure the effectiveness of the "Teacher and Principal Leadership" component of the proposed reform model. The proposed frequency of the continuous improvement assessments per the four focus areas of the reform model is adequate.</p> <p>Of concern is the lack of evidence of a scale-up of measurement tools to be employed as the the proposed project progresses. Besides the use of student and teacher surveys, the applicant did not provide sufficient evidence of an increase in rigor of measurement tools. The inclusion of student performance data with annual student and teacher surveys will likely provide more comprehensive data to make data based decision for the continuous improvement of the reform plan.</p>		

Although the applicant plans to review the annual data from the various assessments (surveys), the applicant does not provide sufficient evidence as to its plan to use the data to make specific modification to the proposed reform plan.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	3
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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant provides sufficient evidence of its plan to communicate the various survey results to key members of the participating schools' leadership teams which include teachers, administrators, and counselors. The plan for communication with the district's Project REACH team is sufficient. However, it is unclear of the applicant's plan to communicate annual project implementation results to parents and external stakeholders.

The applicant does not provide sufficient evidence of a plan to engage external stakeholders in the continuous improvement of the proposed reform plan. One example would be the establishment of a continuous improvement advisory board that would include parents, teachers, administrators, and external stakeholders.

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	3
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(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Since the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCTs) assessment areas are Reading, Math, Language Arts, and Science, the applicant's proposal to use the CRCTs as the academic measure for assessing the percentage of students, by subgroup, who are on track to college- and career-readiness is reasonable. The projected increase by year from the established baseline of each test area of the CRCTs is reasonable.

The applicant's proposal to use the Georgia Student Health Survey II to assess the grade-appropriate social emotional development is appropriate in that it assesses essential social/emotional concerns (such as aggression, bullying, school climate, and drug use) of middle school students.

The CRCTs will provide four performance measures. The Georgia Student Health Survey II will provide eight performance measures. Therefore, the applicant meets the requirement of providing evidence of 12 to 14 performance measures.

Most notable is that "performance measures will be evaluated by comparing Project REACH schools to matched comparisons schools". This comparison will provide a needed parity for the analysis of the data.

The applicant does not provide evidence of an alignment between the CRCTs and the Georgia Student Health Survey II performance measures with the proposed four focus areas of the reform model. It is unclear if the applicant's proposed reform model will be the primary reason for the proposed improvement in CRCTs and the Georgia Student Health Survey II.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)	5	3
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(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents a limited plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the Race to the Top - District funded activities. Teacher and school leadership team surveys and interviews will provide some data for analysis of the effectiveness of the money, time, staff, and funded resource use. However, surveys and interviews can be subjective.

It is expected that there will be modifications to the initial proposed plan. However, the applicant does not provide evidence of a plan of how the applicant proposes to manage this type of change management throughout the grant.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	8
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments:		

The applicant presents a reasonable budget to meet the proposed reform model goals. The applicant provides an alignment of the requested funding to the focus areas of the proposed reform model. Funding for staffing is appropriate. Notable is the allocation of funding for substitute teachers to cover classroom instruction while the participating teachers are trained on technology and other instructional resources to meet the goals of the project. One time investments for the purchase of Blackboard licenses and to create the Middle School Career Exploration Centers is appropriate.

Although the use of contractual employees from Georgia State University to coordinate the evaluation of the project can be helpful, the total allocation of funding for contractual services is unclear. The applicant did not provide specifics on who would be contracted to provide "professional development to the teachers and principals in the concepts and innovations of Personalized Learning, Looping, Assessment and Project-based learning". There is not apparent justification in the budget narrative to support the allocation of \$235,527 in Year 1 and \$201,200 in each subsequent year of the grant for the identified professional development.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	5
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents a reasonable eight strategy plan for sustainability for three years after the grant funding period. The plan covers the main goals of the project to include staffing of key personnel, maintenance of the career exploration center, and continuation of professional development. Appropriate and reliable funding sources are identified to support the sustainability plan.

The proposed sustainability plan is limited in that it is only presented for three years after the grant funding period. It is unclear if the applicant has a long term plan for sustainability. It is also unclear how the applicant plans to scale up the reform model to the other middle schools in the district. The application could be improved by providing a detailed plan for long term sustainability that includes the implementation of the reform model in other middle schools in the district.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	10
Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments: <p>The applicant presents a coherent plan for public partnerships that would augment the proposed reform model. The plan includes the partnering with a variety of social support organization (such as the Prevention Intervention Center and the Success for All Students organization) who all have a proven track record of helping students and their families manage through mental health needs.</p> <p>Notably, is the development of Learning Support Resource Teams (LSRT) which will include an integration of resources from the LEA and the partnering social support organizations to augment programs for students in need of social/emotional help. There will be LSRTs (school and community driven student support teams) assigned to each of the participating schools. This collaboration between school and community organization will likely result in a wrap-around of support for students and their families.</p> <p>The applicant identifies seven reasonable population level desired results that the LSRTs will focus on delivering. These results align nicely with the proposed reform goal of developing the emotional health of the participating students.</p> <p>The applicant asserts that the LSRTs will routinely analyze baseline and performance data related to the population level desired results and target support to individual students as needed. This aligns with the proposed reform model's goal of developing an individualize learning environment. Notable is the applicant's plan to engage parents and other family members of participating students in "decision-making" about solutions.</p>		

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met

Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments:

The applicant presents sufficient evidence of its intent to meet Absolute Priority 1 through the implementation of its R.E.A.C.H. reform model for middle school students. The individualized learning environment as defined by the proposed reform model is likely to be successful because there are significant state and local policies and practices that align with the goals of the reform model. Notable is the current performance based assessments that middle school students take each year. The performance based assessments align with the proposed reform's goal of implementing integrated project based pedagogy.

The applicant presents a reasonable plan for professional development for the participating teachers. The budget allocates sufficient funding for staffing of instructional specialists who will provide targeted instructional resources to the participating teachers. Notable is the plan to utilize the curriculum portal to share instructional resources across the schools. This plan will likely result in effective professional development that will result in success of meeting the proposed goals of the reform model.

Total	210	152
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**Race to the Top - District****Technical Review Form****Application #0230GA-4 for Cobb County School District****A. Vision (40 total points)**

	Available	Score
(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision (10 points)	10	10

(A)(1) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant's vision for reform (and its systemic and replicable approaches to accomplishing it) rests on 4 focus areas: (1) personalized learning for middle school students; (2) professional development for teachers in technology, virtual learning, and integrated project based learning; (3) middle school students' social and emotional needs, learning styles, and interests; and (4) teacher and principal leadership development. Applicant links its 4 focus areas (pillars) to the program's 4 core assurance areas. These aspects are strengths because they address the 4 core assurance areas and are responsive to Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant's vision for restructuring and redesign of 4 of its 25 middle schools advances 7 goals supportive of comprehensive and coherent school reform — (1) redesigning instructional time; (2) promoting personal skills development; (3) building strong interpersonal relationships; (4) improving teacher effectiveness; (5) using comprehensive assessments; (6) integrating technology for teaching and communication; and (7) developing educators' leadership skills. These aspects are strengths because they address the 4 core assurance areas and are responsive to Absolute Priority 1.

- Applicant's overall plan for reform envisions redesigning and restructuring middle schools to deliver interventions, enhancements, enrichments, and related services tailored to meet the social, emotional, behavioral, academic, and developmental needs of lower-performing, mid-performing, and higher-performing students in ways appropriate to their individual levels of cognitive, behavioral, and affective development, their variations in readiness to learn, their variations in demonstrated levels of content mastery, and their needs for deeper and more personally meaningful engagement with content. These aspects are strengths because they contribute to accelerating and deepening learning, improving educational equity, and offering common and individual tasks based on students' academic interests and needs, and they address 2 of 4 common assurance areas as well as Absolute Priority 1.

Weaknesses:

- None noted.
- The applicant's overall vision for reform is comprehensive and coherent and is developmentally and pedagogically appropriate for middle school students and students transitioning into middle school, including students identified as high-need.

Applicant's reform vision, goals, and proposed general approach and strategies all address the creation of personalized learning environments that accommodate the specific social, emotional, behavioral, academic, and developmental needs of individual students demonstrating all levels of performance and content mastery, align resources with improving and ensuring college/career-readiness, and facilitate incorporation of students' interests and input in determining curricular content and methods of instruction. Overall, these considerations place the applicant at the higher end of the high range for this criterion.

(A)(2) Applicant's approach to implementation (10 points)

10

9

(A)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant presents all required data on its participating students and participating educators, including a list of its participating schools. These aspects are strengths because their clear indications of the applicant's intended participants are responsive to the selection criterion.
- Applicant plans to serve 5,191 students (including 1,488 high-need students) and 214 educators at 4 out of its 25 middle school sites and 13 of their feeder elementary schools in grades 5-8 in all academic subjects. These aspects are strengths because they substantiate the applicant's commitment to accomplishing comprehensive and systemic reform in schools that are ready to commit to pursuing it.
- Applicant describes the process it used for selecting its participating schools using focus groups, informational meetings, and school-level team meetings that led to 17 schools volunteering as project sites based on the support of teachers, administrators, students, community, and parents for being initial innovators for the district's restructuring and redesign of middle schools. These aspects are strengths because the support of each middle school's stakeholders will contribute to the overall quality of the applicant's plan and to the likelihood of the project's successful implementation.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant presents a demographic breakdown for the entire LEA, but not for the 4 specific middle schools and 13 feeder elementary schools it plans to serve. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criterion.
- Applicant's table, in which it identifies participating schools, educators, students, and student subgroups, does not provide data for grade 5 in its 13 participating feeder elementary schools. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criterion.

Applicant provides all required data for its 4 focus middle schools and describes its mechanisms for engaging its various stakeholders in determining the scope of its overall project. Overall, these considerations place the applicant at the middle of the high range for this criterion.

(A)(3) LEA-wide reform & change (10 points)

10

9

(A)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant describes its plans to create a student-centered model of instruction for all middle school students and to pilot it at 4 middle schools. These aspects are strengths because they advance project-specific goals and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant identifies 7 overall reform goals — (1) redesigning the middle school instructional day for personalized learning; (2) promoting personal skill development (e.g., goal setting, service, social skills, career exploration, leadership); (3) building strong relationships with students to ensure engaged and productive learning and college/career-readiness; (4) improving effectiveness of all middle school teachers; (5) using comprehensive assessments to improve instructional practice and demonstrate desired outcomes; (6) using technology to support engaged, rigorous, and relevant learning and college/career-readiness; and (7) developing middle school educators as instructional leaders for sustainability of innovations. These aspects are strengths because they advance project-specific goals and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant identifies goals for each of its reform vision's 5 core values, which goals focus on: curriculum, advice and guidance, advancement of learning, learning to learn, school organization, college and career pathways, new technology, mentoring, and student voice. These aspects are strengths because they advance project-specific goals and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant describes its processes and practices for engaging students, parents, families, and community stakeholders to educate them about its middle school reform model, its expectations for college- and career-readiness, and its opportunities for greatly enhancing student learning through inaugurating smaller teaching teams to ensure individualized, differentiated, and personalized learning. These aspects are strengths because they advance project-specific goals, address the 4 core assurance areas, and address Absolute Priority 1.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not discuss scale-up either as a translation to, or a replication in, its other 21 middle schools or as a translation to, or a replication in other middle schools outside the LEA. This aspect is a weakness because the issue of scaling up is part of the selection criterion and the applicant does not plan from the outset to serve all 21 middle schools.

Viewed as a whole, applicant's plan for LEA-Wide Reform and Change is of high quality. It presents a comprehensive table as an overview of its overall plan. The table appropriately aligns its 7 goals, rationale, activities, timeline, persons responsible, outcomes/deliverables, and activities related to its 7 identified goals for its vision for reform. More often than not, the timeline assigns specific months/years to each goal. Consequently, applicant's response has all of the elements required for a higher quality plan. Overall, these considerations place the applicant toward the higher end of the high range for this criterion.

(A)(4) LEA-wide goals for improved student outcomes (10 points)

10

9

(A)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant indicates that its priority will be to close the achievement gap for English language learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and they address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant's describes how the focus of one of its reform vision's 7 goals is to have all students have access to highly effective teachers. This aspect is a strength because it is responsive to selection criteria and it addresses Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant's selected annual increments of improvement in its annual goals appear both ambitious and achievable in the areas for which it plans to measure performance (e.g., 0.3%, 0.4%, 0.7%, 0.9%, 1.1%, 1.2%, 1.3%, 2.2%, 2.3%, 2.5%, 3.4%, 3.9%, 4%, and 4.2% per year gains in each school having the same identified subgroup at the same grade level tested in the same subject); annual goals are ambitious in that those for lower-performing subgroups (e.g., 0.9%, 1.1%, 1.2%, 1.3%, 2.2%, 2.3%, 2.5%, 3.4%, 3.9%, 4%, 4.2%) are greater than for higher-performing subgroups (e.g., 0.3%, 0.4%, 0.7%). These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria.

- Desired increments of change in annual goals are extensively differentiated for each assessment, each subgroup, and each grade range assessed. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to 2 of the 4 core assurance areas and to Absolute Priority 1, and they reflect real differences among student subgroup populations and schools in the LEA.
- Applicant consistently differentiates its forecasts for its target gains in its annual goals so that students overall (i.e., all students) are expected to make smaller annual gains in percent (%) proficient and other indicators than are the identified subgroups – with the consequence that existing inter-group achievement gaps consistently will narrow or close during or after the 4-year project. This aspect is a significant strength because decreasing achievement gaps across student groups is one of the defining focuses of Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant presents baseline and annual goals for postsecondary degree attainment with forecasts of 1% increases per year and of 5% in the first yer post-grant. These aspects are strengths because adopting the optional performance indicator represents evidence of applicant's commitment to improving results of its middle school students' learning in ways that address Absolute Priority 1.

Weaknesses:

- On the State summative assessment for Mathematics (grades 6-8), applicant on occasion forecasts much larger gains in percent (%) testing as proficient from the most recent baseline year to Year 1 than from Year 1 to Year 2 or from any later project-year to the next. As examples – the limited English proficient (LEP) subgroup gains 43%, then gains only 1.1% more per year; the students with disabilities (SWD) subgroup gains 22.9%, then gains only 1% or 1.1% more per year. This aspect is a weakness because it impedes determining the ambitiousness and achievability of its annual goals and its plans for Absolute Priority 1.
- On the State summative assessment for Science (grades 6-8), for the lead LEA, applicant on occasion forecasts much larger gains in percent (%) testing as proficient from the most recent baseline year to Year 1 than from Year 1 to Year 2 or from any later project-year to the next. As examples – the overall group gains 9.3%, then gains only 2% more per year; the students with disabilities (SWD) subgroup gains 24.6%, then gains only 3.9% or 4% more per year; the limited English proficient (LEP) subgroup gains 28.2%, then gains only 2% more per year. This aspect is a weakness because it impedes determining the ambitiousness and achievability of its annual goals and its plans for Absolute Priority 1.
- On the State summative assessment for Social Studies (grades 6-8), applicant on occasion forecasts much larger gains in percent (%) testing as proficient from the most recent baseline year to Year 1 than from Year 1 to Year 2 or from any later project-year to the next. As examples – the overall group gains 9.7%, then gains only 2% or 2.1% more per year; the students with disabilities (SWD) subgroup gains 22.7%, then gains only 4.2% more per year; the limited English proficient (LEP) subgroup gains 39.1%, then gains only 3.4% more per year. This aspect is a weakness because it impedes determining the ambitiousness and achievability of its annual goals and its plans for Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant presents only baselines — but not annual goals — for graduation rates and does so as well for college enrollment rates. These aspects are weaknesses because they impede determining the ambitiousness and achievability of its annual goals and its plans for Absolute Priority 1.
- As benchmarks for comparison, applicant presents only baseline data – disaggregated by subject and subgroup – for academic achievement that reference the State's baselines for the LEA overall and for various LEA student subgroups. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criterion.

Applicant's annual goals are ambitious yet achievable, given that subgroup-, grade-, and subject-specific annual change increments range generally from 1.1% to 4.2% for identified lower-performing subgroups, and are thoroughly modulated by specific subgroups and subjects. Applicant has aligned its district-level, grade-level, and subgroup-level annual goals with those the State has set for the district overall and for its various student subgroups. In addition, the annual goals for all of its performance measures forecast the closing of inter-group achievement gaps by the end of the 4-year project. The attributes of the applicant's high-quality overall plan were noted at (A)(3). Overall, the foregoing considerations specific to LEA-Wide Goals place the applicant at the middle of the high range for this criterion

B. Prior Record of Success and Conditions for Reform (45 total points)

	Available	Score
(B)(1) Demonstrating a clear track record of success (15 points)	15	14
(B)(1) Reviewer Comments:		

Strengths:

- Applicant indicates that the LEA has made significant progress in positively impacting achievement and graduation rates – as evidenced by 34 LEA schools being state-recognized for gains or high performance on state summative assessments, and one of its 4 participating middle schools having improved performance enough to earn being removed from the state's Needs Improvement List. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant indicates that LEA has experienced significant success in implementing systemic initiatives to serve the individual needs of all students – as evidenced over the past 6 years by: 19 LEA schools (6 high schools, 3 middle schools, 10 elementary schools) being state-recognized as Schools of Excellence; 25 Title I schools being state-recognized for making adequate yearly progress at least 3 years in a row, with 15 of these making it for 5 or more years in a row; and 6 LEA schools (one high school, 2 middle schools, 2 elementary schools, one other school) being recognized as National Blue Ribbon Schools. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant indicates that on the state high school summative assessment in mathematics, LEA results for meeting standards for all students rose from 86.4% to 92.6%, for LEP students rose from 63.1% to 69.5%, and for SWD students rose from 61.6% to 76.6%; and on the state high school summative assessment in English language arts, LEA results for meeting standards for all students rose from 95.4% to 96.3%, for LEP students rose from 71.3% to 75.8%, and for SWD students rose from 77.7% to 82.3%. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant indicates that on the state middle school summative assessment in mathematics, LEA results for meeting standards for all students rose from 86.6% to 89.2%, for LEP students rose from 72.3% to 75.9%, and for SWD students rose from 65.2% to 74.7%; and on the state middle school summative assessment in English language arts, LEA results for meeting standards for all students rose 93.7% to 94.5%, for LEP students rose from 82.6% to 84.1%, and for SWD students rose from 78% to 82%. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant presents 4 years of data to document improving student academic achievement on State summative assessments in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria.
- Applicant describes how it makes student performance data available to students, educators, and parents — via school data wall displays, classroom data walls for formative and summative assessment results, individual school websites, and the LEA website — and how it uses such data in ways that inform and improve participation, instruction, and services. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not explicitly and consistently indicate whether the schools where most evidence of a track record of success was accomplished were persistently lowest-achieving schools or low-performing schools, or were its proposed participating schools. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent an incomplete response to selection criteria.

Applicant substantiates its track record of success and overall ability to improve student academic performance results overall and within subgroups, to differentiate services to reflect needs of students performing at varied levels, and to share performance data with parents (among others) and engage them as partners in its reform efforts. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant at the middle of the high range for this criterion.

(B)(2) Increasing transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments (5 points)

5

5

(B)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant addresses in its narrative and 3 attachments the requirement that the LEA make public, by school, its actual school-level expenditures for regular K-12 instruction, instructional support, pupil support, and school administration. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criteria and to one of the 4 core assurance areas.
- Applicant provides evidence — by attaching a sample of the State-mandated school-level reports to which it alludes in its narrative — of the overall transparency of the district's processes, practices, and investments. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criteria and to one of the 4 core assurance areas.
- Applicant provides evidence — in its narrative and 3 attachments — that the LEA makes public: (1) actual personnel salaries at the school level for all school-level instructional and support staff, based on the F-33 survey; (2) actual personnel salaries at the

school level for instructional staff only; (3) actual personnel salaries at the school level for teachers only; and (4) actual non-personnel expenditures at the school level (if available). These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criteria and to one of the 4 core assurance areas.

Weaknesses:

- None noted.
- Both the narrative and attached documentation provide evidence to substantiate the applicant's commitment to demonstrating a high level of transparency in LEA processes, practices, and investments in ways that are responsive to the selection criteria.

Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant at the higher end of the high range for this criterion.

(B)(3) State context for implementation (10 points)	10	9
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(B)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant identifies and describes 7 specific elements of its plan to reform and restructure its participating middle schools in which the State has created conditions or delegated capacities to ensure and promote local flexibility and autonomy under its laws, statutes, and regulations. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criterion and support the defining attributes of Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant outlines the State's rulings on its 7 specific proposed reform elements and articulates how its schools will implement them locally to improve the autonomy of their teachers, principals, and the LEA superintendent to enable all participating students to experience personalized learning and to enable teacher teams to create environments for individualized learning and teaching that focus on the range of developmental and instructional needs particular to middle school students. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criterion and support the defining attributes of Absolute Priority 1.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not describe or cite any specific State statutes, regulations, or policies that provide school districts with the degree of financial flexibility, discretion, or autonomy they need to allocate and commit their financial resources in ways that will support the applicant's plans for reform.

The State's legal, statutory, and regulatory frameworks — as described in the narrative — appear compatible with and supportive of the applicant's plans to address Absolute Priority 1. The one area where the applicant does not furnish evidence is that of flexibility, discretion, or autonomy in the allocation and deployment of financial resources. Overall, these considerations place the applicant at the middle of the high range for this criterion.

(B)(4) Stakeholder engagement and support (10 points)	10	7
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(B)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant indicates (twice in its proposal) that its 4 participating middle schools secured 70%-plus teacher agreement to participate. This aspect is a strength because it is responsive to one of the 4 common assurance areas and to selection criteria.
- Applicant describes a thorough process for engaging many types and categories of both internal and external stakeholders in planning its proposal through multiple forums and in diverse venues. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and they set a precedent for similarly meaningful stakeholder engagement throughout project implementation.
- Applicant attaches a detailed and responsive letter and proposal critique from its State chief executive for education, and it attaches documentation of a stakeholder meeting and feedback from its participants. These aspects are strengths because the letter, critique, meeting, and feedback document meaningful State-level and local executive-level stakeholder support as well as extensive guidance and input for ways the applicant might adjust its responses to the selection criteria.

- Applicant includes detailed letters of support from 3 vendors, 4 community-based organizations, one faith-based organization, 7 parents, one government entity, and 4 education-related organizations. These aspects are strengths because the letters document broad-based and meaningful support among diverse external stakeholders for the applicant's plans for its project.

Weaknesses:

- In its narrative and its attachments of blank survey forms — not survey results — and a letter from one of the 4 middle schools' parent-teacher-student associations (PTSA's), applicant does not provide adequate evidence that teachers from each participating middle school support its proposal. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criteria.
- Applicant's attached letter of support from the county association of educators does not indicate the ratio of teachers in the participating schools, or even among its association members, who support the proposal. This aspect is a weakness because it represents incomplete documentation of stakeholder support for the project among local educators.
- Applicant does not attach or otherwise describe letters of support from its board of education or from its superintendent of schools. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent incomplete documentation of high-level administrative stakeholder support for the project.
- None of the 19 attached letters of support commits any future financial resources to the long-term sustainability of the project, and none specifies what roles the organizations providing 12 of the letters will have in implementing the project. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent incomplete documentation of substantive stakeholder support for the project.
- Applicant does not adequately describe whether or how or to what extent it revised its present proposal based on the engagement and feedback of the many stakeholders it identifies as having engaged in planning it. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criteria.

Applicant presents appropriate evidence that its internal and external stakeholders were directly engaged in developing and/or critiquing the present proposal; however, significantly, it provides insufficient documentation of the existence and level of support of its classroom teachers. Overall, these considerations place the applicant at the higher end of the mid-range for this criterion.

(B)(5) Analysis of needs and gaps (5 points)

5

3

(B)(5) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant indicates that its priority is to close its achievement gaps for English language learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria.
- Applicant provides a comprehensive and thorough analysis of its existing needs and gaps related to academic achievement, presence and persistence of inter-group achievement gaps, dropout rates, and graduation rates. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and assist in determining the current nature and extent of needs and gaps.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not present a plan for an analysis of the logic behind its reform proposal. This is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criterion.
- Applicant does not describe its plan for the analysis of the current status of its needs and gaps throughout its 4-year project and through the first year post-grant. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criterion and impedes ascertaining the extent of ambitiousness and achievability of annual goals for closing or reducing achievement gaps.

Applicant's specific plan for the ongoing analysis of its needs and gaps is of moderate quality. Its narrative and attachment (Appendix 8) do not state a goal or specify activities, timelines, deliverables, or responsible parties as they relate specifically to Analysis of Needs and Gaps during and after the 4-year project period. However, applicant consistently provides detailed, extensive, and comprehensive performance data for its baselines and its annual goals. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant at the higher end of the mid-range for this criterion.

C. Preparing Students for College and Careers (40 total points)

	Available	Score
(C)(1) Learning (20 points)	20	18
<p>(C)(1) Reviewer Comments:</p> <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant details its plans (1) to reorganize the instructional day to increase teachers' time with students; (2) to use dual-certified teacher-pairs to teach extended periods and link content across disciplines; (3) to offer project-based learning experiences to link school-based learning to students' interests and life outside school; (4) to use looping of both teachers and principals to build students' social competence and to address and support their emerging socio-centric developmental needs; (5) to embed technology in project-based learning environments that engage students as self-directed learners; (6) to use student-managed electronic learning portfolios to foster students' self-tracking of progress toward personalized learning goals; (7) to offer interdisciplinary and exploratory courses linked to college/career-readiness; and (8) to develop individualized learning plans for all students. These aspects are strengths because each is responsive to selection criteria and each addresses Absolute Priority 1. • Applicant describes strategies for enabling students to connect standards-based core content and classroom-based learning to their personal, family, and community goals. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1. • Applicant indicates that all educators will loop through grades 6-8 with their students to assist them in experiencing personalized learning and in their developmental needs for building interpersonal relationships and social interaction. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1. • Applicant describes how students and educators will use middle grades individual learning profiles, virtual portfolio systems, and other data-generating tools to monitor students' progress in learning. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1. • Applicant describes how it will structure instructional activities to foster deeper learning and to promote active student involvement with content, and how it will promote students' goal setting, problem solving, and creative and critical thinking skills. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1. • Applicant indicates that teachers will have access to frequently updated individual student data via the State's new student longitudinal data system for regular use in gathering data on students and grouping data by subgroup, grade-level, schools, and district. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1. • Applicant describes how it will use learning style inventories, social/emotional well-being inventories, ability profile inventories, academic performance data from state assessments, local grades and indicators, formative and summative testing data, and PSAT-aligned 8th-grade assessments to populate individual learning plans that shadow students from grade to grade and culminate in creation of individual graduation plans during 8th grade; it documents many of its inventories and assessments in attachments. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1. • Applicant describes how it will train and support middle school students at each grade level to ensure that they understand how to use the personalized portfolios, plans, and other tools and resources to track, monitor, and manage their learning. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1. <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant does not describe how it will provide students with exposure to diverse cultures contexts, and perspectives that motivate and deepen individual student learning. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criteria and Absolute Priority 1. <p>Considered as a whole, applicant's plan for Learning is of high quality. It credibly translates the applicant's guiding vision into concrete and specific goals for Learning, and describes activities and their likely impacts on students' daily learning experiences. It also specifies (e.g., by position title) who will be responsible for doing each activity, states timelines, and identifies outcomes/deliverables for each of its goals related to Learning. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant toward the middle of the high range for this criterion.</p>		
(C)(2) Teaching and Leading (20 points)	20	17

(C)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant describes how its educators will adapt content and instruction to individual students' academic needs, interests, and learning styles. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant describes how it will: (1) reorganize middle school teachers into collegial teams; (2) pair teachers to support cross-disciplinary learning; (3) reduce teacher team sizes via dual/multiple certifications; (4) use coaching to build communities of teachers; (5) use a literacy coach and instructional specialists to develop 6 professional training modules and collaborate with teachers to support project-based learning; (6) use collaborative data analysis to support both acceleration and improvement of student achievement; and (7) use formative assessment and digital learning portfolios to support acceleration and personalization of learning. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant describes its plans for students to use online resources such as a county virtual academy and State virtual school courses to enable qualified students in grade 8 to take courses for high school credit, and to modify virtual resources for middle school student use. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant indicates that it plans to use formative assessments, locally-developed benchmark tests, and other measures to gauge students' interim progress during its implementation of personalized learning environments in its participating middle schools. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant describes how it will evaluate teachers and administrators with the State's new Teacher Keys Effectiveness System and its Leader Keys Effectiveness System as indicators of the educators' overall effectiveness. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant describes how it administrators will use a district-developed walk-through monitoring tool to support teacher effectiveness. This aspect is a strength because it is responsive to selection criteria and addresses Absolute Priority 1.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not delineate its approach to evaluating effectiveness of the superintendent and does not discuss how it will develop and implement such an evaluation. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criteria.
- Applicant does not discuss a high quality plan for improving students' access to effective and highly effective teachers and principals in its hard-to-staff schools or in hard-to-staff subjects or in hard-to-staff specialty areas. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criteria.

Considered as a whole, applicant's plan for Teaching and Leading is of high quality. Applicant focuses on Teaching and Leading in Goal 6 and Goal 7 of its overall plan (Appendix 8). The narrative and the attachment describe the plan's core activities (e.g., obtaining dual/multiple certifications, educator performance assessments), identify key deliverables (e.g., using new state assessments), and specify responsible parties (e.g., school administrators), and present a timeline for Teaching and Leading. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant toward the middle of the high range for this criterion.

D. LEA Policy and Infrastructure (25 total points)

	Available	Score
(D)(1) LEA practices, policies, rules (15 points)	15	11
(D)(1) Reviewer Comments: Strengths: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant discusses the recent revision of its strategic plan, its adoption of 4 new strategic goals aligned with its vision, and its engagement in re-codifying its policies and rules to support its vision and strategic goals, each of which is compatible with Absolute Priority 1. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and support the applicant's plans for Absolute Priority 1. 		

- Applicant identifies and describes 20 specific policies and rules in its Board Policy Manual that facilitate personalized learning in the areas of flexibility and support, frameworks for curricula and instruction, stakeholder engagement and involvement, and resource structures (including funding allocations). These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criteria and support the applicant's plans for Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant indicates that its school-level leadership teams engage in such planning practices as: furnishing input on school schedules, personnel, budget, and instructional models; developing site-level strategic plans aligned with the LEA plan; conducting a site-level response to intervention (RTI) program; and devising site-specific approaches to advancing the district-level framework for student success. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and support the applicant's plans for Absolute Priority 1.
- Primarily at (C)(1), applicant describes its strategies for assisting middle school students who demonstrate varied levels of content mastery and who manifest varied developmentally related needs for social, emotional, and behavioral supports, interventions, and enhancements. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and supportive of Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant describes its adoption and implementation, under the district's Framework for Student Success, of innovative models for delivering more targeted and personalized instruction to students who are English language learners and those who have disabilities. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant indicates that its Framework for School Success creates a single structure of interconnectedness among its schools that fosters their functioning as a unified school system while supporting site-level autonomy and flexibility in how each school operates. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not adequately describe how the LEA central office either presently supports the participating schools or will support them during the 4-year project in the domains of instruction and assessment, so that students can progress and earn credit based on demonstrated mastery, not time-on-topic, and can demonstrate mastery of standards at multiple times and in multiple comparable ways. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent an incomplete response to selection criteria.

Considered as a whole, applicant's plan for LEA Policies, Practices, and Rules is of moderate to high quality. Although applicant thoroughly identifies many supportive practices, policies, and rules, it does not describe an approach — related specifically to LEA Policies, Practices, and Rules — in a way that adequately addresses every required element of a high-quality plan. Its response to the criteria does identify a host of core activities; others are thoroughly presented at (C)(1) and (C)(2), as are some responsible parties. However, applicant does not state a goal, timeline, or deliverables for its plan for LEA Policies, Practices, and Rules. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant at the higher end of the mid-range for this criterion.

(D)(2) LEA and school infrastructure (10 points)

10

5

(D)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant discusses how one of its district-level administrative divisions has inaugurated a department tasked with (1) identifying and supporting strategies to enhance individual student success, (2) translating the district's School Framework for Success into school-level practices, and (3) designing programs that lead to college/career-readiness and accelerate and personalize learning for students at all stages of content mastery. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria and address Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant discusses the availability or use of information technology systems to support its reforms. This aspect is a strength because it is responsive to selection criteria.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not discuss the adoption of open data formats or exportability of data in such formats or the usability of data in other technology-based learning systems. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent an incomplete response to selection criteria.
- Applicant does not adequately describe (e.g., by position titles or central office units) who will deliver appropriate levels of technical support to students, parents, educators, and other stakeholders. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent an incomplete response to selection criteria.

- Applicant does not adequately describe what specific steps it will take to ensure that all participating students, parents, educators, and other relevant stakeholders will have access to necessary content, tools, and other relevant resources both during school hours and non-school hours, or how these will be available to participants regardless of income. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent an incomplete response to selection criteria.
- Applicant does not discuss the extent of interoperability of the State's or its local data systems in terms their inclusion of human resources data or budget data. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to selection criteria.

Considered as a whole, applicant's plan for LEA and School Infrastructure is of moderate quality. Applicant discusses activities that provide organizational support to middle schools and identifies district-level units responsible for it. It does not adequately describe technical support for the data systems, online assessments, online courses, or other technology-based resources it plans to deploy in its schools. In addition, applicant does not furnish a timeline for undertaking its activities related to LEA and School Infrastructure, does not state a goal for a plan for LEA and School Infrastructure, and does not discuss such deliverables as when it will complete deployment of new technologies. Overall, these considerations place the applicant at the middle of the mid-range for this criterion.

E. Continuous Improvement (30 total points)

	Available	Score
(E)(1) Continuous improvement process (15 points)	15	6
(E)(1) Reviewer Comments: <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant describes a plan for evaluation (rather than for monitoring to ensure continuous improvement) that will solicit input from a panel of experts and participating educators. These aspects are strengths because they represent an intention to solicit at least annual feedback from identified stakeholders on the quality of investments in professional development and in school-level educators in supporting the applicant's plan for Absolute Priority 1. <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant's detailed table of methods for evaluation – using 19 questions – is aligned to the project's 7 goals and 4 focus areas; it identifies data collection activities, responsible parties, samples and respondents, and timelines for data collection; but it does not present a similarly detailed plan for continuous improvement which requires more frequent reviews and analysis of performance data than what yearly pre-post surveys or annual state summative assessments can provide. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to selection criteria. • Applicant does not describe how its project will use (pre/post and annual) survey-generated data, annual summative assessments, and other sources of data about the project's performance in its 4 focus areas to provide frequent and formative feedback during implementation in ways that support tracking and monitoring progress, identifying and removing obstacles to successful implementation, making midcourse corrections and adjustments, or re-allocating resources based on performance feedback. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to selection criteria. • Applicant does not present a plan to review and analyze student performance data and educator performance data in determining the need for midcourse corrections and in deciding what corrections or other adjustments it will make. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent an incomplete response to selection criteria. • Applicant does not describe any mechanisms for ensuring rigor in its continuous improvement processes or in selecting and adopting subsequent corrections and adjustments during its project. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent an incomplete response to selection criteria. • Applicant does not identify what mechanisms it will use to ensure rigorousness in its continuous improvement processes after completing implementation of its 4-year project. This aspect is a weakness because it impedes determining the degree of rigorousness of the applicant's continuous improvement process and ascertaining its potential usefulness in making post-grant corrections and improvements. <p>Applicant does not describe a plan for formative continuous improvement, but for summative evaluation. It presents mechanisms for engaging some stakeholders as participants in its summative evaluation plan, but presents none for engaging them in a process of continuous improvement, which requires formative evaluation. It does not describe mechanisms for ensuring the rigor of its monitoring</p>		

and the appropriateness of its midcourse corrections either for during or after the 4-year project period. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant toward the lower end of the mid-range for this criterion.

(E)(2) Ongoing communication and engagement (5 points)	5	2
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(E)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant describes how it will communicate with internal stakeholders, such as by presenting yearly data reports to school-level teams (teachers, administrators, counselors), by holding monthly evaluation team meetings with a district implementation team, and by presenting retrospective reports to participating schools and the LEA. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to that part of the selection criterion that concerns communication with internal stakeholders.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not identify who will be responsible (e.g., as project staff or by other position titles or central office units) for ensuring communication and active or sustained or substantive engagement with the project's internal and external stakeholders. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criterion.
- Applicant does not describe any mechanisms to be used for reaching hard-to-reach parents, families, and communities. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criterion.

Applicant identifies several mechanisms for communicating with and engaging its internal stakeholders, but none for communicating with and engaging its external stakeholders in implementing its project in ways conducive to addressing the 4 core assurance areas and Absolute Priority 1. In addition, it does not specify the parties responsible (e.g., by position titles or central office units) for communicating with and engaging its external stakeholders. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant at the lower end of the mid-range for this criterion

(E)(3) Performance measures (5 points)	5	3
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(E)(3) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant proposes 13 performance measures, which falls within the estimated appropriate number of 12-14. This aspect is a strength because it is responsive to selection criteria.
- In its tables of performance measures presented at (A)(4) and (E)(3), applicant applies formulas for forecasting its annual goals that are reflective of differences in its baselines — for baseline scores of 95.0% or more, it expects a 0.5% gain per year; for baseline scores of 85.0% to 94%, it expects a 1.0% gain per year; for baseline scores of 75.0% to 84.9%, it expects a 2.0% gain per year; for baseline scores of 65.0% to 74.9%, it expects a 3.0% gain per year; for baseline scores of 55.0% to 64.9%, it expects a 4.0% gain per year; and for baseline scores below 55.0%, it expects a 5.0% gain per year. These aspects are strengths because they facilitate determining the ambitiousness and achievability of the applicant's annual goals and are responsive to selection criteria.
- Using its differentiated formulas for forecasting annual improvement targets on each measure, applicant forecasts cumulative gains by the first year post-grant that range from 5.0% to 25.0% depending on the specific performance measure and the range in which its baseline falls; its smaller cumulative gains reflect higher baselines (e.g., above 95.0%), and its larger cumulative gains reflect lower baselines (e.g., below 55.0%). These aspects are strengths because they facilitate determining the ambitiousness and achievability of the applicant's annual goals and are responsive to selection criteria.
- In its tables of performance measures presented at (A)(4) and (E)(3), applicant presents baselines and annual goals for all students (overall) as well as for subgroups based on race/ethnicity, English proficiency, disability, and income. These aspects are strengths because they facilitate determining the ambitiousness and achievability of the applicant's annual goals, enable assessment of closure and reduction of inter-group achievement gaps, and are responsive to selection criteria.

- In the table for its evaluation plan at (E)(1), applicant justifies selection of its applicant-proposed performance measures with specific rationales; identifies rigorous and timely information sources; and presents a theory of action for its applicant-proposed performance measures. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria.

Weaknesses:

- Although applicant indicates that it will use State summative assessment results to determine the numbers and ratios of participating students with effective or highly effective teachers, it presents no baselines or annual goals for these performance measures in its narrative and tables at (A)(4), nor in those at (E)(1) or at (E)(3). These aspects are weaknesses because they impede determining the ambitiousness and achievability of the applicant's annual goals, do not address one of the 4 core assurance areas, and are not responsive to selection criteria.
- Applicant describes how it plans to evaluate its 13 performance measures by comparing participating schools to matched comparison schools within the district on each of the State's summative assessments and on the State's Student Health Survey II – but it provides limited data for making comparisons of baselines and annual goals with students in other LEA schools, other districts, or the entire State. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to selection criteria.
- Applicant does not discuss formative and frequently administered information sources for its performance measures – only summative State assessments, or either annual surveys or pre/post surveys. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to selection criteria.
- Applicant does not provide annual goals for closing or reducing achievement gaps, for increasing graduation rates, or for increasing college enrollment rates. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent incomplete responses to selection criteria.

Applicant presents sufficient information to determine the extent to which the annual goals and performance targets of its performance measures are ambitious yet achievable. At (A)(4) applicant presents extensive and thorough baseline data and annual goals for improved student outcomes on State summative assessments for 5 core subjects, for closing or reducing achievement gaps, and for postsecondary degree attainment rates. However, applicant does not present baselines and annual goals for highly effective teachers and principals or for effective teachers and principals. Applicant also does not present baselines and annual goals for graduation rates or college enrollment rates. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant at the higher end of the mid-range for this criterion.

(E)(4) Evaluating effectiveness of investments (5 points)

5

3

(E)(4) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant plans to administer surveys and inventories to students and/or educators to ascertain their perceptions on: (1) student access to a personalized instructional sequences supporting achievement of individual learning goals, college/career-readiness, and on-time graduation; (2) student use of tools and resources to track and manage learning; (3) enhancement of effective teacher collaboration; (4) use of integrated units of study in longer class periods; (5) strength of student-educator relationships; (6) student efficacy and motivation; (7) use of alternative assessments; (8) educators' capacity to implement personalized learning environments; (9) educators' capacity to adapt instruction to fit students' needs and interests; (10) educators' capacity to accelerate learning; increase in numbers of highly effective educators; (11) educators' capacity to use comprehensive assessments to improve instruction; (12) student skills/traits for college/career-readiness (setting goals, teamwork, and others); (13) student access and exposure to diverse cultures, contexts, and perspectives; (14) student pro-social skills and behaviors; and (15) educators' use of district evaluation and data system assets. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria.
- Applicant plans to use annual State summative assessments of students to ascertain educators' acceleration of learning and reduction of achievement gaps; student summative assessment outcomes; and student socio-emotional outcomes. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria.
- Applicant identifies a partnering state university as the entity responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of investments. This aspect is a strength because it is responsive to selection criteria.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not discuss how it will evaluate the effectiveness of the project's use of technology. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criteria.

- Applicant does not discuss how it will evaluate the effectiveness of its working with community partners or the effectiveness of its decision-making structures. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criteria.

Applicant's plan for Evaluating Effectiveness of Investments is of moderate quality. The plan specifies core evaluation activities, consistently identifies responsible parties and respondents, indicates timelines, and discusses some key deliverables (e.g., when it will deliver project-developed student and teacher surveys) — however, the applicant's plan does not state a goal specifically for its plan for Evaluating Effectiveness of Investments. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant at the higher end of the mid-range for this criterion.

F. Budget and Sustainability (20 total points)

	Available	Score
(F)(1) Budget for the project (10 points)	10	7
(F)(1) Reviewer Comments: <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant's budget appears sufficient to support its proposal. Among reasons for this determination are: requested funding for its 2 project-level budgets in sequence is: \$7,257,673 and \$204,982; and of these amounts, at least \$360,000 (before applying an unstated fringe benefits amount and the applicant's indirect cost rate) is identified as for grant administration by the Project Coordinator. Of the \$7,462,655 total grant requested, \$851,127 and \$12,000 (or 11.56% in total) are designated for sub-contracts. • Applicant provides detailed rationales for investing in requested line items in each of its 2 project-level budgets. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to the selection criterion and facilitate determining whether the costs are necessary, reasonable, and allowable. • Applicant's salary and wage schedules and fringe benefit rates are described as reflecting local policy. These aspects are strengths because they contribute to determining the reasonableness and sufficiency of the proposed budget. <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In its Project Level Itemized Costs tables, applicant does not differentiate between its one-time investments and its ongoing operational costs. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criteria. • Applicant requests a total of \$2,058,306 for Supplies in its Project 1 sub-budget, but does not provide a detailed cost analysis of its sub-items. This aspect is a weakness because it impedes determining the reasonableness and sufficiency of the proposed budget. • Applicant does not explain adequately how it has determined it to be necessary to allocate 8% of its grant request for external evaluation – identified in a Project 1 description of cost assumptions for the Contractual cost category at \$187,000 per project year. This aspect is a weakness because it appears both unnecessary and unreasonable given that the enabling program will require all grantees to participate in a national evaluation. • Applicant does not state its specific fringe benefits rate (or rates) or the fractions for each component (listed in a budget justification narrative) used in calculating it (or them). This aspect is a weakness because it impedes determining the reasonableness and sufficiency of the proposed budget. • In its Project 1 Project-Level Itemized Costs explanation of its cost assumption for Fringe Benefits, applicant cites its indirect cost rate (IDR) of 0.99%, a facet verifiable by reviewing the Project 1 Total Indirect Costs rate (line 10). This aspect is a weakness because it impedes determining the reasonableness and sufficiency of the proposed budget. • In its Project 1 Project-Level Itemized Costs explanation of its cost assumption for Supplies, applicant budgets for Learning Style Inventory Kits for 5th Grade Students at 66 Kits x \$150 (\$150 per 25 students to cover 1,643 5th Graders). This budget sub-item is a weakness given the absence of discussion of activities involving the 5th grades in the proposal narrative. • Applicant provides no attachment of a letter or proposed budget to document or detail the cost assumptions of its proposed Project 1 evaluation sub-contract. This aspect is a weakness because it impedes determining the reasonableness and sufficiency of the proposed budget. • Applicant does not consistently identify other sources of funds that will support its project; it does not cite some sources of funding (e.g., IDEA Part B, NCLBA Titles IIA and IIB, and others), which can readily be coordinated with, and used to leverage, 		

its requested ARRA grant funds. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criterion.

Overall, these considerations place the applicant at the higher end of the mid-range for this criterion.

(F)(2) Sustainability of project goals (10 points)	10	6
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(F)(2) Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant identifies 8 action steps and related strategies that it plans to use to ensure the post-grant sustainability of its project, including publicizing the results of its performance evaluations to solicit financial support from local, state, federal, and private grant programs, and sharing and presenting its success stories with key community stakeholders to solicit local financial support. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria.
- Applicant presents a 3-year post-grant sustainability plan; it identifies a potential source of funding (Title I) and it indicates an intention to continue 9 instructional specialists and a middle school program coordinator. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not describe the roles of State and local government leaders in providing financial support or other resources during the post-grant period; none of the 19 attached letters of support commits to any future financial support. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the selection criterion.
- Applicant does not identify which specific practices, policies, or processes it expects to continue after the 4-year project period or how it plans to select which ones to sustain financially post-grant. These aspects are weaknesses because they impede determining the reasonableness and sufficiency of resources for, and district commitment to, sustaining the project in the post-grant period.

Considered as a whole, applicant's plan for Sustainability is of moderate quality. Applicant's discussion of Sustainability describes activities and responsible parties, but does not present a goal, timelines, or deliverables specific to Sustainability — and thus does not present some of the required elements of a high-quality plan. In addition, applicant provides very few specifics about its potential sources of post-grant funding and it provides no evidence of any explicit commitments to such funding from any public or private source. Applicant further provides inadequate detail in its plans to commit existing and foreseeable funding resources (e.g., NCLBA Titles IIA and IIB) ordinarily available to Title I-eligible school districts to sustaining its strategies post-grant. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant toward the higher end of the mid-range for this criterion.

Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)

	Available	Score
Competitive Preference Priority (10 total points)	10	7

Competitive Preference Priority Reviewer Comments:

Strengths:

- Applicant identifies 3 population-level desired results related to its plans for the Competitive Priority — one focuses on educational results, and 2 focus on family and community results. These aspects are strengths because they support the plan described in Absolute Priority 1.
- Applicant describes how its school/community student support team will routinely analyze baseline and performance data to track its 3 indicators for participating students in its Competitive Priority activities. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to selection criteria.
- In its Competitive Priority activities, applicant plans to focus its resources on high-need students, (e.g., disabilities, poverty, transiency, limited English proficiency). These aspects are strengths because they support the plan described in Absolute Priority 1.

- Applicant describes a 3-tiered plan (universal/school-wide, selected, intensive) for delivering comprehensive and integrated school-based and community-based socio-emotional and behavioral services at its participating schools. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to Competitive Priority selection criteria.
- Applicant identifies the mechanisms it will use to engage parents and families in decision-making and in identifying student, family, and school needs. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to Competitive Priority selection criteria.
- Applicant describes how its Competitive Priority activities will build middle school staff capacity to assess students' needs and assets; identify and inventory school and community needs and assets; and create the means to select, implement, and evaluate appropriate supports for participating students. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to Competitive Priority selection criteria.
- Applicant identifies desired results for each of its 3 indicators; furthermore, its annual goals for 6 of its 7 performance measures are ambitious and achievable – as evidence, each indicator forecasts an improvement from the baseline measure of 5% per year during the 4-year project period. In addition, applicant's annual goals for its 7th performance measure are ambitious and achievable – as evidence, the indicator forecasts as annual goals increases of 60 mentor-student matches per year from a baseline of zero matches. These aspects are strengths because they are responsive to Competitive Priority selection criteria and support the applicant's plans Absolute Priority 1.

Weaknesses:

- Applicant does not describe a partnership with external public or private agencies such as those listed in the selection criteria – rather it describes a plan for 3 of its existing district-level departments/programs (a Prevention Intervention Center, a School Social Work Department, and that department's Success for All Students program) to align resources and integrate services for its participating middle schools. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent incomplete evidence of the existence of a partnership that is responsive to Competitive Priority selection criteria.
- Applicant does not document – in letters of support or other attachments – that the current partners in its Success for All Students program – which are identified as a County Community Services Board (a local public mental health agency), a County Sheriff's Office, and a County Juvenile Court – have committed to partner in providing support or services related to implementing the applicant's plans for the Competitive Priority. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent incomplete evidence of the existence of a partnership that is responsive to Competitive Priority selection criteria.
- Applicant does not document – in letters of support or other attachments – that partners acquired during implementation of its Success for All Students program – a County Department of Public Health, a state university, a polytechnic state university, several after-school programs, as well as unnamed local municipalities, unnamed local law enforcement agencies, unnamed civic groups, and unnamed faith-based organizations – have committed to partner in providing support or services related to implementing the applicant's plans for the Competitive Priority. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent incomplete evidence of the existence of a partnership that is responsive to Competitive Priority selection criteria.
- An attached letter of support from the only one of the partners acquired during implementation of the applicant's Success for All Students program to provide one – Communities in Schools – does not indicate a commitment to participate as a partner in implementing the applicant's plans for the Competitive Priority. This aspect is a weakness because it represents incomplete evidence of the existence of a partnership that is responsive to Competitive Priority selection criteria.
- Applicant does not describe how it plans to match the results of its 3 indicators for participants in its Competitive Priority activities against an aggregate of all middle school students in the LEA. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to Competitive Priority selection criteria.
- Applicant does not adequately describe the complementariness of its Competitive Priority activities or their seamless integration with its regular school-day services at its 4 participating middle schools or its 13 participating feeder elementary schools. These aspects are weaknesses because they represent an incomplete response to Competitive Priority selection criteria.

While the applicant's Competitive Priority activities – as proposed – may support its plans described in Absolute Priority 1, the evidence presented for the existence of a partnership supporting the applicant's plans for Absolute Priority 1 is incomplete. The absence of evidence (e.g., documented in letters of support or other attachments) for the commitment of external public and private agencies to participating – as partners in a partnership during and after the 4-year project period – impedes determining the extent to which the applicant's plans are responsive to Competitive Priority selection criteria.

Applicant provides no evidence in attachments to document the commitments of the many named and unnamed organizations to which it alludes in its narrative. It does not substantiate any commitments of such entities to conduct any of the activities it describes for its 4-year project period, nor does it document any commitments by any external agencies to sustain them in any way financially post-grant.

Considered as a whole the applicant's plan for its Competitive Priority is of moderate quality. It specifies 3 program indicators, identifies responsible parties for its comprehensive interventions, states a goal, describes core activities, and identifies some of its deliverables (e.g., when it expects to have made 60 new mentor-student matches); however, applicant does not provide a timeline for its core Competitive Priority activities. Overall, the foregoing considerations place the applicant at the higher end of the mid-range for this criterion.

Absolute Priority 1

	Available	Score
Absolute Priority 1	Met/Not Met	Met
Absolute Priority 1 Reviewer Comments: <p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicant's overall plan is comprehensive in terms of its scope – as evidenced by its proposing 2 project-level budgets and one supplemental budget, as well as by its targeting all core subjects in the 4 middle schools and 13 feeder elementary schools in the LEA. Applicant's overall plan is also comprehensive – as evidenced by its proposing strategies that address all of the 4 core assurance areas (standards and assessments, data systems, effective teachers and principals, turning around lowest-achieving schools). Considered as a whole, applicant's plan for Absolute Priority 1 is coherent and responsive to its selection criteria – as evidenced by its focusing its goals and strategies as well as its requested funding on – creating personalized learning environments; personalizing strategies for both teaching and learning; significantly improving learning outcomes overall and for identified subgroups; aligning instruction, curricula, assessment, and professional development with college- and career-ready standards; promoting accelerated learning and achievement for all students; providing extensive supports and interventions for high-need students who are not demonstrating mastery of content and skills; increasing the effectiveness of educators through extensive and intensive professional development as well as data-driven assessment, monitoring, and evaluation of its school-, classroom-, and student-level impacts; increasing graduation rates as well as college enrollments; and improving students' college- and career-readiness. <p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The coherence of the applicant's plan is incomplete in at least 3 respects: (1) the applicant does not adequately identify the sources of financial resources it expects to use to sustain its key strategies after the 4-year project period ends; (2) the applicant does not adequately describe its plans for scaling up its project by exporting and replicating it in other middle schools within the LEA or elsewhere; and (3) the applicant does not provide adequate evidence to document that teachers from each participating middle school support its proposal. Beyond these limitations, the applicant's plans for stakeholder engagement, continuous improvement, and sustainability are generally of moderate quality. <p>Overall, in light of the above considerations, the applicant has met Absolute Priority 1.</p>		

Total	210	160
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Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)

	Available	Score
Optional Budget Supplement (Scored separately - 15 total points)	15	0

Optional Budget Supplement Reviewer Comments:**Strengths:**

- None noted. Applicant does not budget for activities supporting dissemination or replication in schools across the Nation, and it does not present a plan for implementation across two or more LEAs; consequently, its activities and the budget proposed for them do not meet the requirements of the notice of funding availability.

Weaknesses:

- In its Optional Budget Supplement Project-Level Budget Narrative, applicant does not discuss to what extent or in what way it presents a clear, discrete, and innovative solution that can be replicated in schools across the Nation. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the Budget Supplement selection criteria.
- In its Optional Budget Supplement Project-Level Budget Narrative, applicant does not present a rationale for the specific area or population it proposes to address. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the Budget Supplement selection criteria.
- In its Optional Budget Supplement Project-Level Budget Narrative, applicant does not describe how it would carry out activities that would be co-developed and implemented across two or more LEAs; its budget supplement seeks further resources only for enhancing services within the applicant LEA at the same participating schools as in its plan for Absolute Priority 1. This aspect is a weakness because it represents an incomplete response to the Budget Supplement selection criteria.

In its Optional Budget Supplement Project-Level Budget Narrative, applicant does not present a high-quality plan. A timeline is implicit in its budget request being for 4 years; responsible parties are implicit in its budget including line items for personnel and fringe benefits; and its deliverables are implicit in its descriptions of Contractual cost sub-items related to professional development. However, applicant does not describe core activities (particularly those supporting wide-scale replication) and it does not articulate a goal specific to its Budget Supplement. These aspects are weaknesses because they lack critical elements defining a high-quality plan and they represent an incomplete response to the Budget Supplement selection criteria.